

**Brussels, 29/11/2022**

**Ms. Ursula Von Der Leyen**

*President of the European Commission*

Sent via email to:

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**Mr. Josep Borrell**

*Vice President of the European Commission/High Representative*

Sent via email to:

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**Object: latest attacks of Iran and Turkey against Kurdish areas in Syria and Iraq and the military crackdown of Iran on its Kurdish regions**

**To the President of the Commission Ursula Von Der Leyen,  
To the Vice President of the Commission/High Representative Josep Borrell,**

We, undersigned members of the European Parliament, are writing you to raise our serious concern about the **latest attacks of Iran and Turkey against Kurdish areas in Syria and Iraq and the military crackdown of Iran on its Kurdish regions.**

The air strikes launched by Turkey on the 19 and 20 November in Syria and Iraq have been carried on **in retaliation for the Istanbul terrorist attack** and targeted bases of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Syrian Kurdish YPG/YPJ militia, which Turkey says is a wing of the PKK.

Ankara has indeed blamed Kurdish militants for the blast on Istiklal Avenue on 13 November, despite no group has claimed responsibility for the explosion and the PKK and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have denied their involvement. In particular, **the YPG/YPJ have never acted on Turkish soil nor used terrorist tactics.**

According to a spokesperson for the SDF, the Turkish strikes had destroyed infrastructure including grain silos, a power station and a hospital. Eleven civilians, an SDF fighter and two guards were killed<sup>1</sup>.

We cannot let Erdogan instrumentalise yet another tragic event, and allow him to use the Istanbul blast as an excuse to resume brutal attacks on Kurdish areas. **This is indeed not the first campaign of aggression against the Kurdish people and it is unlikely to be the last** if we do not take action.

In recent years, Turkey has launched many cross-border military operations with the aim of defeating Kurdish-led forces the Turkish government considers “terrorist” organisations.

Turkey has conducted **three incursions so far into northern Syria** against the YPG/YPJ militia and escalated its drone strikes in Syria in recent months, killing a number of key SDF officials. Ankara also regularly carries out air strikes **in northern Iraq since April 17** and has sent commandos to support its offensives against the PKK. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), there have been numerous allegations of use of chemical weapons by the Turkish forces, on which a special Iraqi Parliament Committee is currently investigating<sup>2</sup>.

In the meanwhile, **at home Erdogan continues its crackdown on Kurdish political movements** such as the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/turkey-bombs-kurdish-militants-in-syria-iraq-in-retaliation-to-istanbul-blast/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.euronews.com/2022/10/26/doctor-detained-after-calling-for-turkish-army-chemical-weapons-probe>

pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), with prison sentences issued for many HDP politicians and activists, including former co-chairs Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, and more recently a legal procedure that aims to close the party down.

Moreover, in the past few days, **the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps** have intensified their repression on Kurdish-majority cities and towns **in western provinces of the country** following reports that parts of some small towns have fallen into the people's hands in the wave of protests that is shaking the country. The **Islamic Republic of Iran** has also launched repeated attacks against Iranian Kurds sheltering in **Iraqi Kurdistan** on the pretext that separatist Kurdish groups are fanning the flames of conflict in Iranian Kurdish cities by supporting the protesters<sup>3</sup>.

The **United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq** said that Iran and Turkey's renewed attacks and the violation of Iraq's national sovereignty **must be stopped immediately**, noting that such violent actions increase the tension in the region and would lead to a tragedy<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, Iranian Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi, himself an IRGC commander, reported of a conversation with his Turkish counterpart, voicing support for "a stable and strong Turkey", underlying that the countries have common enemies and calling for more serious cooperation in dealing with "those who make the two countries unsafe."<sup>5</sup>

**The potential planning of a joint invasion on the eastern and northern fronts of Iraqi Kurdistan** may or may not have been at the centre of the talks on 17 November between the interior ministers of Turkey and Iran, Suleyman Soylu and Ahmad Vahidi. Nevertheless, this possibility alone should work as a wakeup call for us.

**Silence and inaction only caused the Turkish state and its ally to increase their attacks.** In the face of the war crimes and inhumane crimes committed against the Kurdish people, many of which had resisted, fought and defeated ISIS with much sacrifice in 2014 and have been continuing their fight since then, the international community is not doing enough to defend them.

Dear President Von Der Leyen,  
Dear High Representative Borrell,

As a champion of universal human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule-based international order, the European Union must **raise its voice against** such deadly attacks that are in clear violation of international and humanitarian law.

Moreover, in Rojava and in Bashur, Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians and Armenians, have created in a period of wartime a democratic alternative that led to peace. It is of utmost importance to defend their achievements, also because with tens of thousands of jihadists detained in north-eastern Syria, the end of this experience could pave the way for a new attempt at a caliphate like Isis, leading back to the situation of 2014.

We are therefore writing to you, in our capacity of Members of the European Parliament, to impress upon you the **urgent need to take action with regard to Iran and Turkey cross-border attacks against the Kurdish people and prevent another humanitarian catastrophe.**

We call upon you, as Commission President and Vice President/High Representative, on behalf of the European Union:

- to speak on behalf of the European Union and to coordinate a strong a persistent diplomatic action with

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/21/iran-attacks-positions-in-northern-iraq-targeting-kurdish-groups>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/news/2022/07/un-mission-iraq-condemns-attack-duhok-which-left-8-dead>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/478807/Iran-Turkey-interior-ministers-denounce-terrorism>;  
<https://euobserver.com/opinion/156430>

Member states, also within the United Nations and NATO, **to clearly and publicly condemn Turkey and Iran attacks in Syria and Iraq and to urge the Turkish and Iranian authorities to immediately halt any cross-border military operation;**

- to appeal the United Nations, the International Anti-EI Coalition, and our NATO partners to act to ensure that our Turkish ally **behaves consistently with its international commitments and in accordance with International Law;**

- to vehemently reject **the politically motivated attempts to ban the HDP** and urge the Turkish authorities to **fulfil their International legal obligations** and implement the decisions of the Council of Europe and European Court of Human Rights condemning the prosecution of HDP mayors and politicians and demanding their release;

- to urge the **Iranian authorities to immediately halt the use of lethal force against unarmed protesters** and remind them that failure to halt the continued violations will result in intense and coordinated international diplomatic repercussions;

- to call for an United Nations investigation on the allegations concerning the use of chemical weapons by Turkish forces in Iraqi Kurdistan;

- to use all leverage and tools at our disposal **to foster a climate of peace and dialogue in the region**, making sure that the **voices of Kurdish people are heard, their aspirations are responded to** and they are granted the opportunity to decide their own future, and to clarify what initiatives the Commission intends to take in this regard.

We hope in your strong support for this cause, and we avail this opportunity to convey our assurances of highest consideration,

Yours Sincerely,

**Fabio Massimo CASTALDO**, *Member of the European Parliament (N.I.)*

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